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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2016

TAGS: MARR PHUM PINS PREL PTER CE

SUBJECT: FRANCE SETS CONDITION ON PARTICIPATION IN SRI LANKA CONTACT GROUP

REF: A) STATE 149054 B) GORDON/GOWER E-MAILS 9/12 AND

9/20

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The GoF will send a three-person interagency delegation to the Sri Lanka contact group meeting on September 27. The MFA is asking that all discussions in the contact group remain strictly confidential, that the Sri Lankan government receive only the most general briefing on the group's activities, and that Sri Lanka agree not to discuss the contact group with the press. France is concerned that the existence of the contact group could be used by the Sri Lankan government as a pretext for derailing the resumption of peace talks set to resume in Oslo during the first week of October. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Per Ref A, we met September 11 with Sonia Barbry, MFA desk officer for Sri Lanka, to inform the GoF of the contact group meeting. On September 20, Barbry said France would send three participants to the meeting, one from the Embassy in Washington, one from the counterterrorism unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one from the intelligence unit at the Ministry of the Interior. The specific participants will be determined by September 22.

¶3. (C) Barbry stated that while France intends to participate in and supports the aims of the contact group, it is wary that the timing of the meeting could impede Norwegian mediators' efforts to bring the government and the Tamil Tigers back to the table for the first time since April. She cited Norway's criticism of the EU's decision to place the Tamil Tigers on a list of terrorist groups, complaining that it provided the Sri Lankan government with a potential pretext for suspending negotiations.

¶4. (C) To ensure that the contact group remained both effective and low-profile, the MFA proposed three conditions. First, it wants assurance from all members of the group that the discussions will be strictly confidential and will not be

shared with the press or other non-governmental organizations. Second, the MFA asked that any subsequent briefings given to the Sri Lankan government be as general as possible. In that way, group members would feel free to speak openly and share information with each other, and no outside groups could claim that the contact group was beholden to the Sri Lankan government and under pressure to provide regular reports to the GoS concerning its activities.

Finally, France does not want the Sri Lankan government to share the briefing with the press.

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